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AVANT GARDEN BISTRO IS THE PLACE TO EAT

Drink And Start A Revolution

BY MICHÉLE STUEVEN

As the vegan revolution continues to mushroom throughout Los Angeles, few restaurants like Avant Garden Bistro are devoted solely to products that come out of the ground. There’s nothing Beyond or Impossible on the menu, just plain plants celebrated in their elegant purity.

Tucked away up a hidden staircase on Melrose Avenue, you’d never guess that it’s an L.A. offshoot of Overthrow Hospitality’s Ravi DeRossi’s Avant Garden in New York. While it’s meant to evoke a French bistro, the romantic and cozy spot feels like a hideaway you’d find Linda Ronstadt and the Eagles unwinding after a Troubadour gig in the ’70s. The plant-based bistro only opened a few months ago, but feels like a West Hollywood mainstay.

The outdoor garden resembles a romantic enchanted forest and was designed by Andrew Nowling, a 25-year veteran of exterior set design for film and television including Euphoria, Carnival, Ballers and The Family Man. Indoors, the moody and plush dining room was designed by DeRossi, who is also the co-founder of the Death & Co. bar brand.

“There are five red hanging lamps over the bar, three green ones over the red banquettes and one matching green lamp adjacent to the banquettes by the window,” DeRossi tells L.A. Weekly. “They supposedly originated in France – I don’t know the designers, as I bought them from an antique auction online. I chose them to match the burgundy velvet curtains made by my mother and the red banquettes made by a friend of mine.”

“The entire design of the inside with all the profound colors and decadent fabrics was made to look and feel like an old French cabaret,” he says. “And also to create a distinct opposition to the lush greenery of the outdoor garden. I chose these light fixtures specifically because they give very specific pointed light, over the bar or at a table you can feel as though this light gives you the illusion that you are in a private space, that possibly no one is near you and your party, and that maybe you can act as such. They create an intimacy that I loved.”

The tapas-style menu includes a revolving selection of toasts and cold items like avocado served on crispy sushi rice topped with carrot ginger dressing and miso alongside blistered shishito peppers. Other warm perennial items include a black garlic puttanesca with olives, capers and red chili. Another signature dish that is a staple on the New York menu takes the humble and lowly carrot into orbit with a pistachio chermoula and classic French spring onion sauce and blood sorrel leaves.

Strictly beholden to the seasons, Chef Sarah Stearns’ new fall menu was announced this week and includes purple sweet potato toast with cashew ricotta, spiced chutney on warm, freshly baked focaccia, green cavatelli with artichoke, hazelnut and preserved orange. There’s also fried green tomato toast with remoulade, house-made mustard on sour-dough, broccoli with turnip cake, spicy peanut vinaigrette, and a crunchy celery salad with apple, wild rice and Koji vinaigrette. Desserts include a devil’s food cake with coffee and cinnamon crumb, and the caramel apple — a tahini blondie with pistachio ice cream.

According to Bloomberg, sales in the plant-based meat category are not just flat but declining, according to data from Information Resources Inc. Beyond Meat announced this month that the fake meat company is reducing its workforce by 19% after a decline in sales. Bloomberg notes a study done by Deloitte Consulting, which surveyed 2,000 consumers, and found a decline in the belief that plant-based meat grown in a lab is healthier and more environmentally sustainable than meat from animals.

“What draws me to vegetables is extremely difficult to explain,” says DeRossi. “If canvas and oil paint did not exist and I told a group of artists I just invented these products, well, the art world would go crazy. That’s how I feel about vegetables, like they were just invented in all their beauty and complexity. We set out to make each individual vegetable become the best version of itself. For generations, vegetables have been shoved to the side, never taken seriously, just something that you must eat in order to lead a healthy lifestyle. We want to change the narrative and put the often forgotten vegetable at the center of your plate, much like Jan van Eyck did with oil paint.”

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Best Preroll - Cali-X Preroll

We haven’t mentioned Los Angeles locals Cali-X in a bit, but they’ve certainly been up to a lot. Specifically, they have some of the best in-house manufacturing SOP in the game for their Prerolls and Rosin. In this case, we’ll spotlight the prerolls. They are probably the nicest preroll in California that doesn’t have any hash in it. When you rip them open you are greeted by chunky material that could have only come from whole buds. They also smoke and taste great. If you’re a preroll person in general, these should be high on your list.

Best New Event Series - Doja Hollywood Strain Premiers

Doja Pak was already doing numbers in L.A. even before we covered the RS-11 drop back in the day which took things to the next level. This time they are breaking new ground again and taking over Thursday nights on the calendar with their Hollywood Strain Premiers. The event series essentially provides a mechanism for them to show off their new flavors in a direct-to-consumer format. The series started with the launch of Permanent Marker in June, to show of their new flavors in a direct-to-consumer format. The series started with the launch of Permanent Marker in June, one of the biggest strains of 2022.

Best Blunts - Brothers Broadleaf

More people stepped their blunt game up in 2022 and the team at Brothers Broadleaf was leading that movement with their lineup of fantastic products. Even their bottom-tier Dudz line is better than everything else on the market. But they certainly shine the most on their Paxton’s Pearls and Connecticutt Broadleaf lines. Both are exceptionally well done and light years ahead of what you’ll find behind the counter at the gas station. Keep an eye out on their website for the drops and don’t sleep when you see them available.

Best Deal - CAM

Year after year California Artisinal Medicine continues to pump out the heat. This was reaffirmed earlier this year when it took home top honors at the Secret Sessions Cup. In the blind contest, CAM’s Kush Mints would reign supreme over the rest of the pack. Already known for their crazy deals, expect even more as their new Sacramento cathedral of heat comes online. CAM is already undercutting

Consistency is the name of the game to stay afloat in the current cannabis industry with many nothing it’s the most brutal time for the game in history. This has led to a lot of fake hype by people desperate to sell their weed. Alien Labs is the opposite of that. The quality of the flower has led it to be one of the most popular and recognizable cannabis companies in the world. Be sure to get your hands on their new flavors, they were among our favorites at the recent edition of Hall of Flowers.

Best Legal Dabs - Kalya

We featured Kalya in our 7/10 issue in 2021 and they’ve only continued to crush it in the time since. A ton of new flavors are always one of their highlights, but their recent Emerald Cup win in Collaboration with Cosmic Edibles was delightful. Another new twist from Kalya since we last covered the company is cold-cured rosin. At first, it looked like Kalya was going to stay clear of the trend but a fantastic batch of Marshmellow OG changed all of that in an instant. Kalya has also greatly expanded its footprint in Southern California over the last year so it should be even easier to find them all over town.

Best New Local Flavors - Maven

Maven continued its expansion efforts in 2022 with a new flagship dispensary off Ventura Blvd in Tarzana. The main thing backing Maven’s expansion while much of the game is hurting is great genetics. Mavens consistently deliver some of the best recreational cannabis grown in California. Their wide lineup of flavors is sure to have something for everyone but the latest standout has to be the French Laundry. The French Laundry was one of the top strains at the Santa Rosa edition of Hall of Flowers.

Best at living up to the hype - Alien Labs

The only celebrity brand with 20 years of experience, besides B-Real, Chauncey Leopardi’s Squintz line continues to deliver the heat to LA. The lineup of flavors was even competitive enough to be featured in the inaugural edition of Zalympix. Squintz was also one of the first recreational brands to move over to a clamshell case inside the mylar to protect the nugs. The recent collaboration with Foreign Genetics on the Wendy was another hit and it was of course named for the most famous kiss of his life. But don’t expect to find a gimmick in the bag, it’s all heat.

Best Import - Fig Farms

The Emerald Cup opened up the indoor category last year to make the contest more inclusive to L.A. cultivators unfortunately the Oakland OGs at Fig Farms would have none of it and took the trophy home for themselves. The new lineup from Fig is even nicer than the gear that took for spots in the top 20 at the cup. A lot of their past hype was driven by their defining renditions of Seed Junkie strains, but founder Keith Healy just popped a ton of seeds of his work. Fig’s in-house genetics were regularly featured on podiums in the mid-2010s before their contest hiatus.

Best Celebrity Weed - Squintz

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Best New event - Zalympix

Over the last year and a half few things have stormed the cannabis scene in Los Angeles quite like Greenwolf’s Zalympix. The idea of one of the premier dispensary in L.A. hosting a contest made perfect sense, but I don’t think anyone could imagine for fast the series would take off. There is a reasonable argument to be made the contest is now the second most respected in the state after The Emerald Cup. Greenwolf is also opening Green Wolf South LA this Saturday at 5400 S Broadway.
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Best OG Event - The Secret Sesh
Arguably the most respected event series on the planet, The Secret Sesh came out of the pandemic with no lost steam. After transitioning to digital media a bit more while the word was closed, they came out the gates flying when it opened back up. Why? Because of the event's decade of dedication to providing Angelenos a great time and access to some of the best weed on the planet. Their recent Halloween festivities were as popping as ever.

Best New Local Brand - Serge Cannabis
On the heels of the Blackberry Gary launch, Serge Cannabis has made waves up and down the state with its founder and namesake. Sure its founder and namesake already etched his name in L.A. cannabis history with his efforts to help launch Cookies Maywood and Fiore, but if they keep dropping heat like the Blackberry Gary it won't be long until we have to add Serge's lasted endeavor to his list of L.A. accomplishments for sure.

Best Local Garden for a Diverse Palate - 3C Farms
3C Farms has you covered. That being said the OGs are what put them on the map and that should be your first pick when you visit the shop for the first time. L.A. edition of the Transbay Challenge I host. The KMZ was a Zkittelz Terp-heavy delight. It was easy to see why the judges were so excited on it and why the community is so excited to see flowers coming out of his new facility.

Best Cuts - Green Dragon
Green Dragon continues to not only provide Los Angeles with well above average flowers, but also great genetics. While many would horde the dope cuts the team at Green Dragon has secured over the years, they're mumming them up and getting them out to the masses. A lot of people appreciate the commercial viability of clones given the lottery ticket aspect of buying seeds, not everyone is going to be a winner.

Most Hyped Local Flower
When we covered Fidel's transcontinental adventures in our 7/10 issue, we spent a lot of time going over how he brought the Hash Hole style preroll back from Barcelona. But his flowers are also crazy, a month after we ran that story he would win the L.A. edition of the Transbay Challenge I host. The KMZ was a Zkittelz Terp-heavy delight. It was easy to see why the judges were so excited on it and why the community is so excited to see flowers coming out of his new facility.

Best Local Weed Holiday - Free Seed Day
Free Seed Day has quickly turned into one of the most iconic days of the year for Los Angeles cannabis enthusiasts. Hosted at Masonic's on Fairfax, the day is a celebration of Los Angeles genetics. Last year even saw an appearance from the always elusive Capulator. Keep an eye on Masonic Smoker's Instagram page. This year it took place in April just a few days before 4/20m just in time to get your seeds popped and into the yard for summer.

Best Local Garden for a Diverse Palate - 3C Farms
3C expanded into Downtown in 2022. They brought with the one of the widest lineups of flavors in the state. Whether you're looking for a great OG, a Jack that turns back the clock, or some weird lime thing you've never even smoked before, 3C Farms has you covered. That being said the OGs are what put them on the map and that should be your first pick when you visit the shop for the first time. As Gorilla Rx celebrates one year as a retail model for the possibilities of L.A.'s social equity program, most of those who attempted to take part in the program still linger in limbo with a likely action against a proven anti-Black city council likely.

Despite these troubles, this tale starts as one of conquest and Gorilla Rx founder Kika Keith jumping the hurdles to get open in the first place despite whatever mentality those who approved of the rules had about people that looked like her. Most importantly, Keith continues to rise to prominence as an operator advocate nationally.

She feels that community support accelerated the process of Gorilla Rx becoming a destination for Los Angeles cannabis enthusiasts. She thought it would take a few years to get where they are right now, one of the struggles of social equity programs everywhere is the gap between advocacy and execution. Many well-intended social equity advocates do not have the experience Keith does in running a retail entity during one of the darkest times ever for the California industry. So the last year will give Keith's message that much stronger an ethos while making it easier for her to call bullshit on bad ideas, given her personal experiences.

Keith herself called Year One for the shop interesting. “The juxtaposition of the celebration of just making it and having so much of a community be in support of what we're doing has been tremendous,” Keith told L.A. Weekly. “And then you get hit with the real-life cannabis industry bullshit of these taxes. When I look at how much more good I could be doing in the community, and being the benefit of the community.”

When asked the most surprising thing from Year One, Keith again pointed to community support. She emphasized how intertwined Gorilla Rx and its 30 employees are with the community they call home; Keith noted 90% of the staff live in the area. “Trying to get them up to living wage jobs and be able to have enough health benefits and dental benefits. That’s all eaten away by taxes. So that realization, you know?” Keith said.

Gorilla Rx paid the state and municipality 1.3 million in taxes during its first year in business. A big number, but we noted it also was kind of cool she had to pay that much in Year One.

“And that’s exactly what I’m saying,” Keith said with a laugh. “We have done extremely well for our first year and yeah, you know, we, we opened on the premise of what we intended on doing for our community. And I'm just looking forward to being able to be more of a benefit to the community”.

Keith said now that they made it past year one, the next endeavor is the training center next door, for sure. There she will provide...
blocks were real. To me, it makes us push the angles and then they find out that these said. “So you never know if you’re doing to this extent to operate a business, “ Keith brothers and sisters get in and intervene folks. Keith had to have one of her Latino I told you so. She couldn’t get meetings with years. Keith found the situation to be a big equity applicants in L.A. over the last few whole narrative of what has happened to York and LA County. have included policymakers from New these groups, “ Keith said, noting those calls advantage of… I’ll get calls. I get invited to carry the ball most of the way, just to have people tweak things to their preference at the last minute regardless of consequences. “Unfortunately, I’ve seen politicians take advantage of… I’ll get calls. I get invited to these groups,” Keith said, noting those calls have included policymakers from New York and LA County. Some would argue the events around the anti-Black commentary reshaped the whole narrative of what has happened to equity applicants in L.A. over the last few years. Keith found the situation to be a big I told you so. She couldn’t get meetings with folks. Keith had to have one of her Latino brothers and sisters get in and intervene for her. “You never had to be politically engaged to this extent to operate a business,” Keith said. “So you never know if you’re doing the right protocols, and have you got all the angles and then they find out that these blocks were real. To me, it makes us push harder. That’s the first thing I saw when I saw the news like, OK, listen, what are the things that were demanding and this is the time to make it happen.” One thing that might happen is a legal challenge of the entire Social Equity Program. Keith already has received plenty of phone calls on the subject.

The line of thinking here is, a lot of Black families lost generational family resources holding on to retail locations as required, to get permits. Should those people get reimbursed by the city since the whole process was not coming from a proven place of racism? “This is a growing conversation, specifically from social equity applicants saying that they lost everything,” Keith said. “I’ve gotten numerous phone calls like, Kika can we do something? Is there some legal action? You know, we’re in a situation to qualify for Social Equity, you have to be low-income. And so though I do believe that we have such a strong case to present the key is the cost.”

We asked Keith what she would do if she was one of the people still waiting to get open.

Here, my plan would be to organize a class action lawsuit, period.

“And even though you know I am celebrating, that’s still my first thought. Because how many of my peers have their doors open? Five or six, right? Out of the 200 still to this day. As of the beginning of next year, they’re the folks that are still left, which I believe is 140, who haven’t even gotten temporary approval, their licenses will be abandoned.”

Keith explained the city’s obligation was only to process 200 licenses, not give out 200 licenses.

“It’s something that real effort has to be made on, at this point of organizing still. Because that racist-leaning council definitely held back policies and rules that would have allowed us to advance our doors. And so the fight still continues and the only reason why I have my doors open today is because we fought to get these doors open. This wasn’t even handed to us.”

We asked Keith to think back on the wider equity fight and her own personal battle to get open. Were there any particular moments where, at the time, she couldn’t understand the thought process?

“I think as many times as we went down to City Council and the Commission thing, this is happening to us, and this is why the mayor’s office called that audit,” Keith replied. “And then, it was still wrong and they still wouldn’t budge in our favor and that we had to go all the way to raising funds to sue the city to get them to change - that’s the only reason I’m in this position right?”

Keith noted as much as they tell people to get out and get involved, the normal civic process didn’t work because the public officials weren’t even abiding by the moral and ethical guidelines. [1]
destination for cannabis travel and tourist attractions. “Emerald Village West Hollywood” marks America’s first municipal cannabis tourism board and they’ve done a lot to make this a reality, from creating tourism maps to launching a “Please Respect Our Neighborhoods” campaign promoting responsible cannabis (no smoking in public) to launching a “Come Out For Cannabis” movement highlighting similarities between decriminalization and the struggle for LGBTQ rights to networking partnerships with cannabis businesses in Amsterdam. They’re out to tout both The Artist’s Touch above and Woody Harrelson’s theWoods - the gorgeous dispensary that just opened its own consumption lounge in the area, complete with lush garden oasis atmosphere and private cabanas available to rent by the hour. Look for more consumption spaces including one from High Times magazine (TBA) to bring more shine to this gem of a neighborhood.

(Read Jim Devine’s interview with Harrelson in the Cannabis section on LAWeekly.com to learn more.) emeraldvillageweho.com/the_woods

**Flower Power**

Sun + Earth certified brands – distinguishing weed that’s holistically, responsibly, and regeneratively grown – are highlighted in displays at theWoods. They also top Flowerhead.co’s feel-good offerings. The user-friendly new weed web destination might become your new aesthetic addiction if you’re into the experience of online cannabis. Smoking out and shopping on the computer/cell phone are two pastimes many enjoy at the same time, after all. The style-minded marketplace created by Angeleno musician John Gold puts an emphasis on “highly curated” artfully packaged flower brands and high-end accessories (like fancy sleek pipe designs from Sackville and Session, for example). The e-commerce site also offers more in-depth product information than most, state-of-the-art search tools, easy product discovery and navigation, and branded content. Gold just collaborated on a hand-selected gift guide with his favorite gear and sun-grown flower from theWoods, with Sun + Earth approved products, all of which you can buy on the site and have delivered to your door.flowerhead.co, sunandearth.org/

**California Love**

Inspired by its origin as a family driven company, Tradecraft Farms touts a personal approach to weed. The So Cal-based company is owned by brothers Brent and Barry Walker, aka the Dub Bros (“dubs standing for “w”), which was born in Downtown Los Angeles. They’ve been in business for a decade now focusing on cannabis as a craft, and a community. From cultivation to retail, they take an educational approach to their own grown goods and to the selling of others in their stores.

Tradecraft grows hydroponic indoor because as they say, “it allows for precision” and removes unpredictable variables in the growing process such as pollution or air particulates. From jars to pre-rolls, there’s a casual and cool Cali vibe permeating all their products, which are clearly aimed at discerning smokers looking to buy the best. In addition to Tradecraft, the Walker brothers keep busy with their Stick.E.Vapes brand, their competitively priced Better Days Farms blends, their Cali Roots dispensaries, and local charitable efforts, including the upcoming Gobble Gobble Give and Skid Row Xmas events, both of which feed the homeless in downtown L.A. during the holidays. dubbros.com, shoptradicraftfarms.com

**Laser Force**

We’ve come a long way since the old Graffix plastic bong days. Today, there are countless smoking devices to choose from out there, and most are designed to deliver the smoke in the most efficient and enjoyable way possible. Hitoki is one of many brands on the forefront of “canni-tech” with its laser smoking devices. Their Hitoki Saber is a new portable take on their laser combustion device using the same technology but in a more compact way. Boasting a clean smoking experience, the handheld vessel is used with the Hitoki bubbler or your favorite glass rig. Water is added to the bubbler, which then attaches to the base of the unit, while LED settings vary according to the smoke you want. In all, it’s a form-meets-function-meets-force experience. hitoki.com

**Taste the Rainbow**

For many, a compact pipe to carry in a pocket or purse is ThePerfect Companion. It’s the name of Perfect Blends’ adorable 5-Piece Micropipe Set, and it fits. Portability is a key component here, but the compact metallic rainbow collection also will appeal to compulsive matchers (guilty) who like every accessory to be part of their look. The slim cig-sized individual hitters offer a 75mg dose that should give three to four tokes per bowl. Microdosing will dig these, as will germaphobes - the company suggests stashing them away on the go and sharing a fresh pipe with friends instead of passing. This is the company that also sells joints you cut in half so you can avoid sucking the same wet doobie. COVID is still out there people! They also suggest matching the micropipe colors with their different blends, including Happy Camper, Pick Me Up, NightCap or Sexpot. perfect-blends.com

**Rock n’ Roll**

Wiz Khalifa, Tommy Chong, Wayne Coyne and Laganjia Estranja are just a few of the notable pot lovers who contribute insights in the book, How We Roll: The Art and Culture of Joints, Blunts, and Spliffs. Exploring rolling culture around the world, the tome offers tips and tricks for perfecting an important skill: rolling the perfect joint, from “The Scorpion” to “The Braid” to “The Holy Cross.” The how-to guide has it all: diagrams, descriptions, techniques, and interviews. You’ll be rolling like Snoop Dogg’s highly paid “handyman” in no time. The book is actually written by Noah Rubin, the editor of Snoop’s hit cookbook, From Crook to Cook (he’s also the former editor-in-chief of Snoop’s media platform, Merry Jane, and the former editor-in-chief of Nas’s media platform/production house, Mass Appeal, before that). chroniclebooks.com/products/how-we-roll

**Pot Pride**

Green Queen in Downtown L.A. remains one of our favorite dispensaries for its emphasis on equality and community. They weathered two robberies last year, proving a resilience that anyone who loves this industry can appreciate. Their collaboration with bounce queen Big Freedia launching the new weed brand called Royal Bud – with strain names including Ya Wiggle (Hybrid), You Already Know (Indica) and Mardi Grass (Sativa) - brought a flamboyant new vibe to the crowded flower market that we appreciated, and more is coming. We’ve written about queer nightlife producer Andrés Rical (Evita, Jagger) many times over the years and his foray into cannabis brings the same aesthetic pizzazz and attention. We’re here for it and you should be, too. Women and QTBIPOC-led brands are prioritized on the shelves inside this colorful, high-design space, and proceeds are directed to the development of its soon to come DTLA Proud Community Center, providing much-needed resources and services to the queer community. thegreenqueen.com
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